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ONLINE COLLECTION IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Households selected in the ABS's Labour Force Survey traditionally responded through a telephone or face-to-face interview, but from December 2012 the option of responding through an online questionnaire was introduced to provide respondents with greater choice and to ensure that data collection remains cost-effective. This note provides updated information on the take up rate of the online questionnaire.

BACKGROUND

From December 2012 to April 2013, the ABS conducted a trial of online data collection. During this time, respondents in one rotation group (i.e. one-eighth of the survey sample) were offered the option of self completing their Labour Force Survey (LFS) questionnaire online instead of via a telephone or face-to-face interview. From May 2013, the ABS expanded the offer of online collection to 50% of each new incoming rotation group. This coincided with the introduction of the current sample, based on the 2011 Census of Population and Housing. From September 2013, online collection has been offered to 100% of private dwellings in each incoming rotation group and by April 2014, 100% of private dwellings were being offered online collection. Interviewer collection (both telephone and face-to-face) continues to be available for those respondents where online self completion is inappropriate for operational, technological or personal reasons.

The ABS used the initial trial of offering online data collection to one rotation group and the progressive introduction of the offer to other rotation groups, to measure the impact on the Labour Force series of the move to online self completion. Statistical analysis during this period concluded there was no evidence of any reporting bias due to the introduction of online questionnaires. However, the analysis could not rule out that some small impact may be present, as the sample of online reporters was not sufficiently large to detect if there were any small impacts. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of online responses has not identified a significant impact from the move to online self completion.

CURRENT COLLECTION PROCEDURES

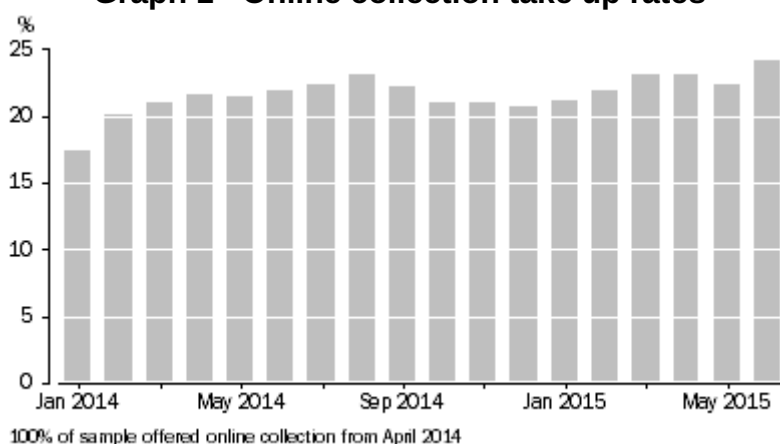
Households selected in the Labour Force Survey are sent a letter and brochure informing them that they have been selected to participate in the survey. Since February 2014, survey respondents are asked to use the unique user name and password provided in the letter to register an email address and other contact details for the household, or to contact the ABS if they are unable to participate in the survey online. A notification is then sent to respondents who have registered their contact details electronically to advise that the survey questionnaire is available for completion online within a specified one week period. Respondents who are unable to participate in the survey online, along with respondents who register contact details for the

household electronically but do not complete the survey questionnaire online within the specified one week period, are subsequently contacted by an ABS interviewer to complete the survey questionnaire either via telephone or face-to-face. This represents an "opt out" approach to online data collection, and encourages survey participants to complete the survey online where possible at a time which is convenient to them.

ONLINE COLLECTION TAKE UP

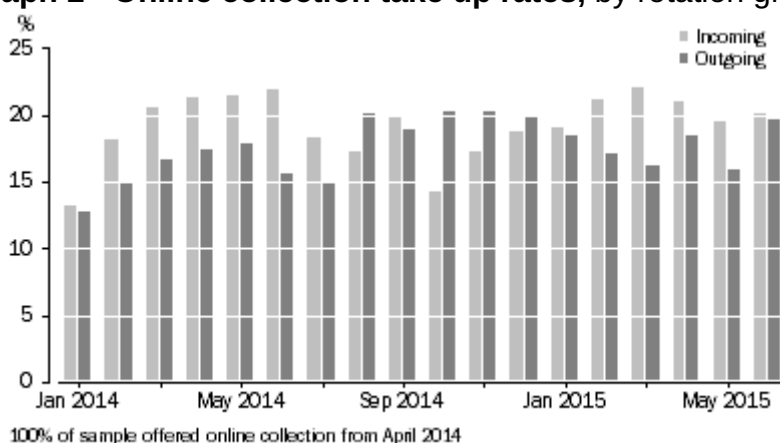
Graph 1 shows that online collection take up rates in aggregate were very consistent since January 2014. The lowest take up rate since January 2014 was 17.4% in January 2014 (when only 81% of the sample was offered the online option), with the highest at 24.1% in June 2015. The average take up rate since January 2014 was 21.6%. This compares to the 2013 average take up rate of 17.5% of those offered an online option. The ABS is continuing to explore options for making online collection a more attractive option for households.

Graph 1 - Online collection take up rates



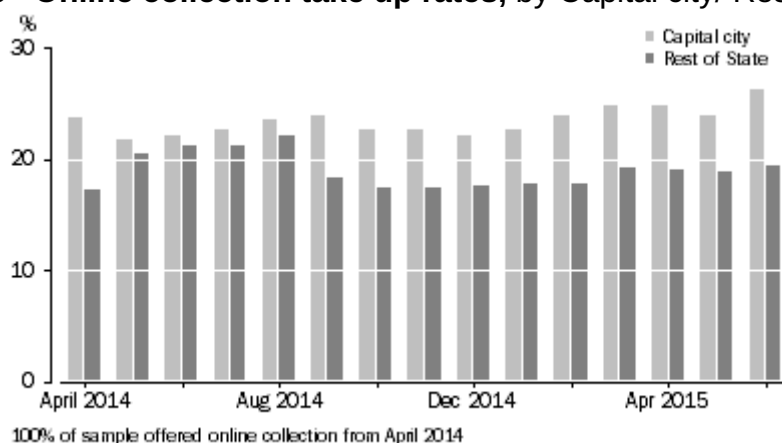
The LFS sample is divided into eight distinct sub-samples, or rotation groups, with each sub-sample remaining in the survey for eight months. A new rotation group is introduced each month to replace an outgoing rotation group. This replacement sample generally comes from the same geographic area as the outgoing one. Graph 2 shows that online collection take up rates varied somewhat between incoming and outgoing rotation groups since January 2014. The largest absolute difference in take up rates was seen in June 2014, with the take up rate for the incoming rotation group 6.3 percentage points higher than for the outgoing rotation group. The difference in the take up rate between an outgoing and incoming rotation group is one cause of the variation in month to month take up rates shown in Graph 1.

Graph 2 - Online collection take up rates, by rotation group



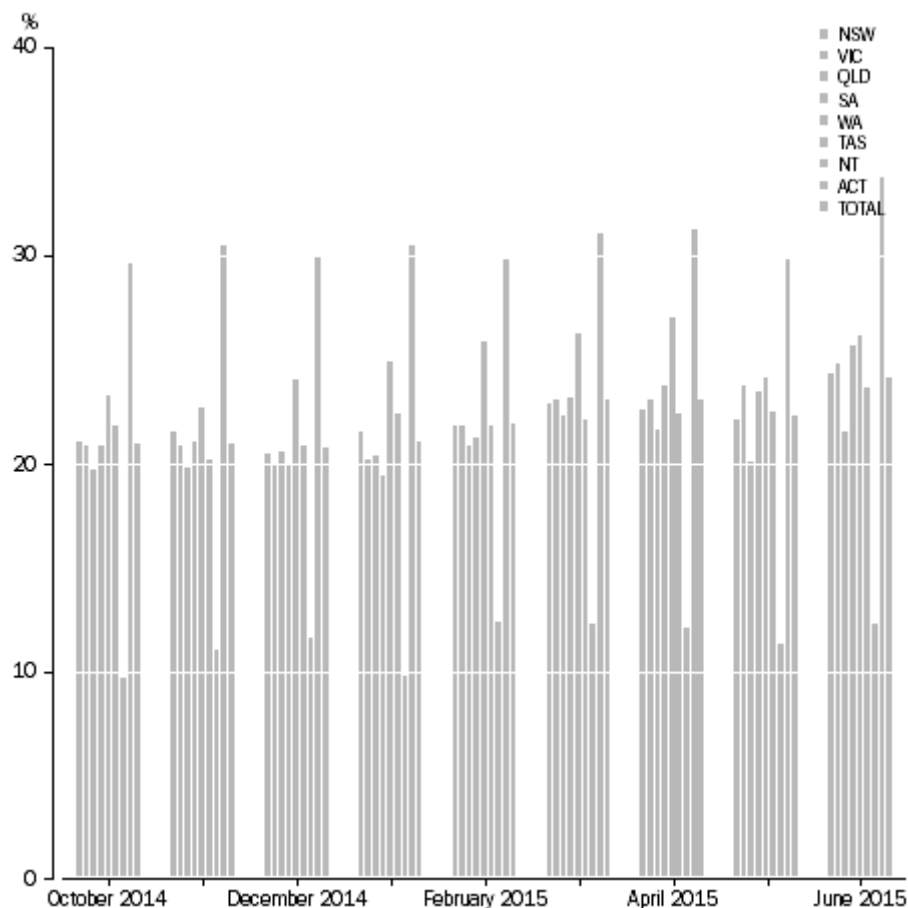
The LFS sample can also be thought of as comprising sub-samples based in each capital city and the rest of each state. For the period April 2014 (when the online option commenced being offered to 100% of the sample) to June 2015, the combined online collection take up rates for capital cities were consistently higher than those for the combined rest of states (refer Graph 3). The largest difference in take up rates was seen in June 2015 where the combined capital cities rate was 6.9 percentage points higher than that for the combined rest of states. From April 2014 to June 2015, the average take up rate for the combined capital cities was 23.5% and 19.1% for the combined rest of states.

Graph 3 - Online collection take up rates, by Capital city/ Rest of State



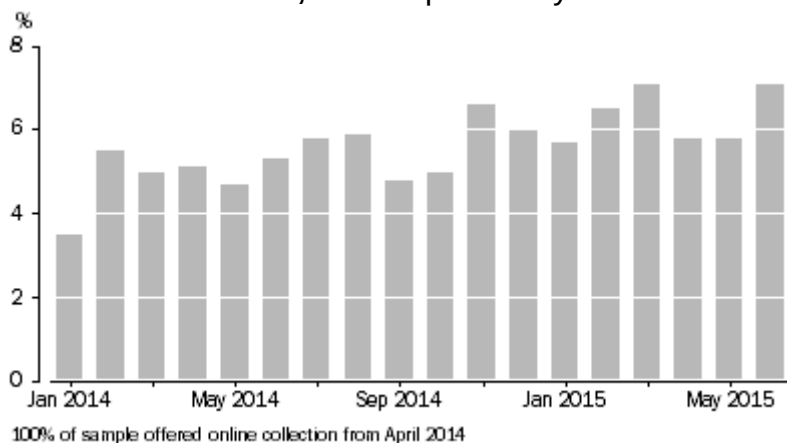
Graph 4 shows that average online collection take up rates for each state for the period October 2014 to June 2015 were fairly consistent with the highest take up rate seen in Western Australia (at 24.9%) and the lowest in Queensland (at 20.8%). This contrasted with results for each territory, which varied most from the national average of 22.0% for these months. The average take up rate for the same period for the Northern Territory was 11.4% (noting that online data collection was not offered to sample in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and very remote areas), while the take up rate for the Australian Capital Territory was 30.7%.

Graph 4 - Online collection take up rates. by state



Survey respondents who complete their survey with the help of a trained interviewer in a month are still able to use online collection for any subsequent month in the survey. Graph 5 shows of those survey respondents who completed their survey with the help of an ABS interviewer in the previous month, the proportion who used online collection in the following month. For example, of those survey respondents who completed their survey with the help of an ABS interviewer in May 2015, 7.1% subsequently completed the questionnaire online in June 2015.

Graph 5 - Online collection, % from previously interviewed households



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